

CALL of
CTHULHU

THE
SECOND
AMPHORA

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THE SECOND AMPHORA

PREAMBLE

We invite you to read the below text to your players before starting the scenario proper:

The screen is still black but a sound begins to be heard. A voice intones an almost musical litany. Maybe in a dialect of Arabic, or Persian... or in a much older tongue.

An old man, but not too old, of coloured-skin, with a sparse and white-haired beard, in a clear-coloured robe and with a turban hums while rocks himself, sitting. It is a dark room, barely lightened by feeble flames that make shadows flicker. Next to him is another man, lying on the floor. We are not able to see his face, but he is moaning and his body full of burns. The sitting person brings a small bowl to him and helps him to sit up so he can drink from it. The lying one, we see his bandaged face now, drinks and coughs.

THE ASSAULT

Baltimore, Maryland. October 2nd, 2018. 10:28 AM.

The PCs are joining a SWAT team (Special Weapons And Tactics – a Police assault team) about to assault a flat. Right now they are in the hallway of a housing building, where nothing is specially remarkable beyond the obvious negligence in its maintenance. There are a dozen operatives with tactical gear lined up at each side of the door. Characters are in their own plain clothes (good moment to ask them what are they wearing and how they look like), and wearing also an uncomfortable and heavy black bullet-proof vest with the word “POLICE” written across in big white block letters. If it fits their profession they may be armed with pistols or revolvers (bigger firearms are limited to the assault team, PCs would be armed just for their own safety, never to take part in the assault proper).

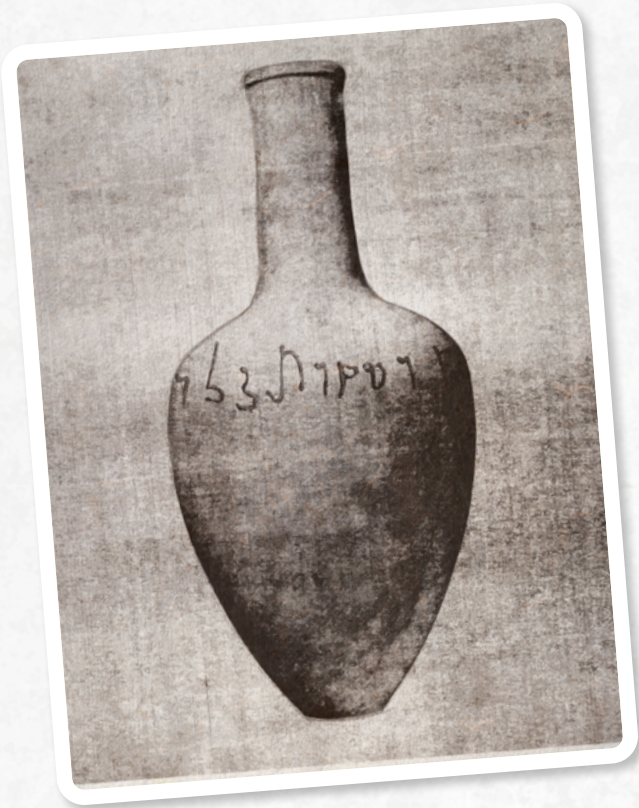
The purpose of the action is to arrest the members of an antiques-trafficking network, and to seize the artefacts they may have in their possession.

Ask the players how their characters feel. Are they stressed? Have they taken part in similar actions already? Do they know any of the operatives? Do they remember any such assault that went wrong? Are they thinking on any specific safety measure or manoeuvre they were instructed about...? Specifically, PCs are participating in an advisory role (as per their professions). It would be enough for one of the PCs to have been invited by the Police to justify the presence of the others, as the first one would have asked for them as support.

The true goal of the PCs, beyond the cooperation with the authorities, is to find a specific amphora they believe could be in the flat. They have never seen it and they only have a draft drawing (**game aid 1**). The amphora is ochre-coloured, has an edging of inscriptions next to its neck, has a wax seal in its mouth, and is approximately 1.5 meters high (5 ft).

The policemen enter. The PCs stay behind. Someone shouts orders around. Gunshots are heard and something breaks. But confusion lasts little. When the characters step in they see an Arab man, dressed in a traditional way, lying on the floor, and with a gunshot injury on his chest. The operatives talk to the radio informing that they are in and that the place has been secured. One of the agents confirms the death of the man on the floor by placing his fingers on his throat. The assault team leave so that characters can “do their job”. In a few minutes more personnel will come in to help with the inventory.

Alone now, the PCs find themselves in a relatively small flat, full of cardboard and wooden boxes and small Arab-style objects of all sorts and shapes. Some of the items seem to be on display, or maybe they were out of the boxes to be evaluated, cleaned or restored.



The corpse lies on the floor of a side room, located beyond the main room the entrance gives access to. There are also two noticeable objects, in glass cabinets. To the left, some-thing resembling a trough, made of stone and engraved with silhouettes of farm animals, on top of a plinth. To the right, a meter and a half-long (5 ft) amphora, lying on a red cushion, inside a broken glass cabinet –likely broken by the gunshots-. The shot may have hit the vessel also, as it shows a hole and several cracks around its base.

While characters study the surroundings and try to identify the item they need to carry away, suddenly, the man on the floor begins to mumble: “you must protect the other amphora”, grabs the closest PC by the ankle and invites them to go closer to his face. He repeats the words “you must protect the other amphora”, and hands the character a small chain he takes off from his own neck. A small key hangs from the chain, with a metal tag showing the number 314. Right at that moment the man passes away.

ALONE WITH THE AMPHORA

The amphora looks as it had been described to them although, as said, its base is cracked, as is the glass cabinet inside which it lies.

The first character to touch the object feels a shiver (give this information only to that player). Besides that, nothing remarkable. The vessel weighs as much as a piece of such volume and material would be expected to weigh and is easy to carry inside the black evidence bag they have taken along. It is hard to determine the contents (if any). If they decide to remove the wax seal (or it they find any other wilder way of accessing the interior), a mass the size of a fist is inside, likely composed of leathery putrid skin. A character with medical knowledge can easily presume it is probably muscular tissue. (Actually, it is a mummified human heart, but this is impossible to find out unless it is taken to a laboratory, something we are going to make sure the PCs do not have time to do.)

Now, you need to find a way to take the character who touched the amphora first aside for a second. They may hear a noise in another room, want to investigate something further, or just visit the toilet. We need just a few seconds.

Out of the blue, one of the walls close to that character melts into fire. From among the flames, a daemonic face takes form and stares at the PC intently. It is a reptilian face full of pointy appendages, and somehow very appealing. Immediately, out of a sudden the vision disappears and the wall is restored to its previous normal state. If the PC studies the wall there is nothing out of the ordinary, not in the materials nor in the temperature; nothing that makes them think this has been anything more than a momentary hallucination (SAN 0/1).

THE LOCKER

The small key the dying man has given to the characters belongs to the luggage locker in the central bus station. Any PC can conclude this easily.

The situation in the bus station depends on the time of the day in which they visit it. If they decide to go there just as they leave the flat we can assume they’ll reach it at around noon or close to 1:00 PM. We’ll (boldly?) assume you have been in at least one bus station in your

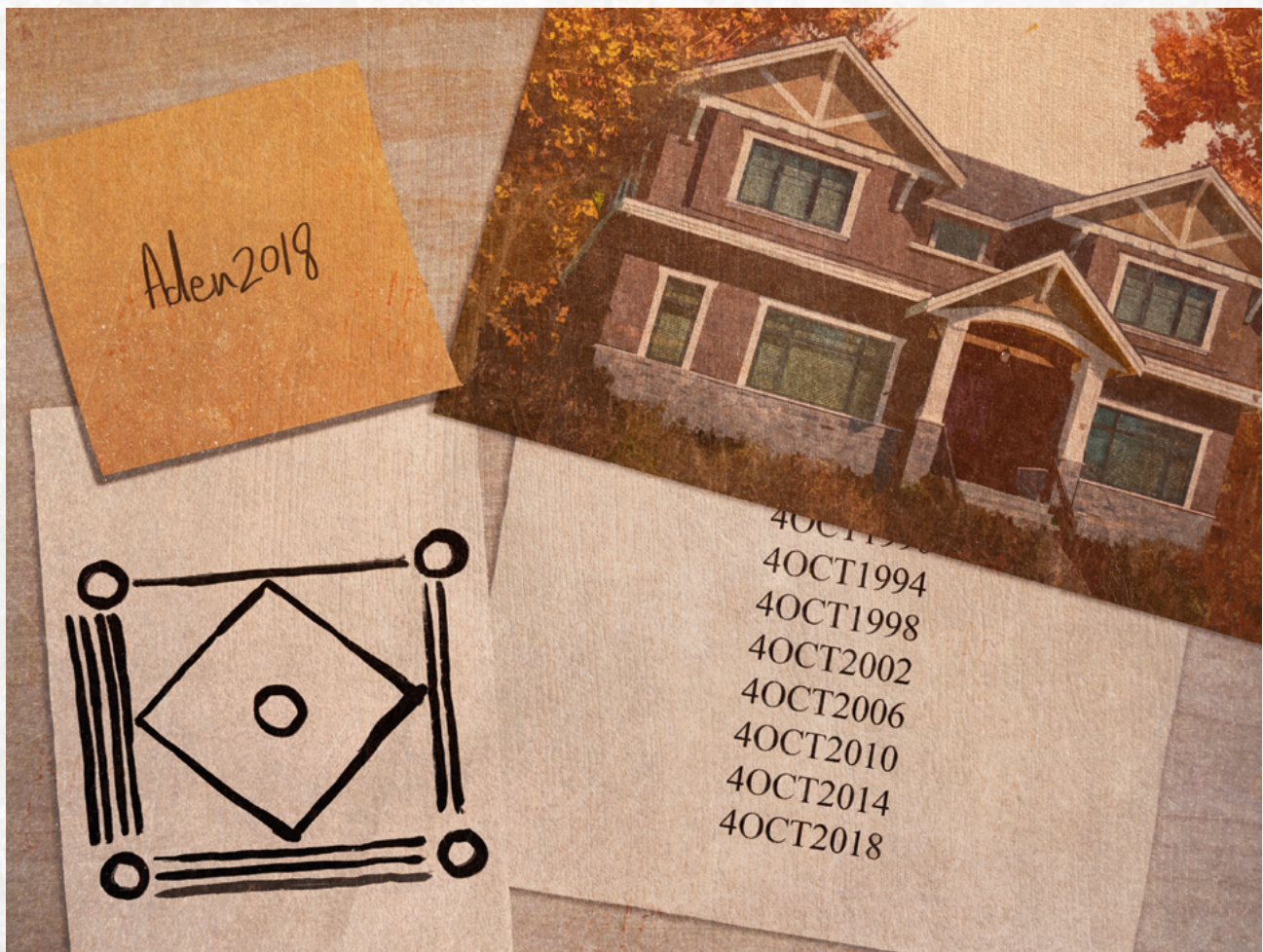
life, so we are not going to give you many guidelines on how to describe the scene. The important thing here is to toy with the players' paranoia; so make sure there are plenty of people there. Drop basic descriptions of someone sitting at a bench reading a newspaper, of a cleaner leaving their trolley next to a trash bin they are emptying... maybe taking too long to do it, and of a group of Arab-looking people, two or three adult men, talking to each other standing up close to the lockers area.

When one of the characters walks to the numbered cabinets, a man bumps into them (into whomever is carrying the key if they are all going together) and the PC hears how the man whispers "free it". If the character confronts the man, he claims he has not said anything. He is a young blond man, with long untidy hair, a three or four day beard, jeans, a red checked shirt open over a white sleeveless t-shirt, and a dark

blue truck driver cap. The first thought is that the young man's voice does not even correspond to what the whisper-ing sounded like.

The contents of the cabinet number 314 (that can obviously be opened with their key) are as follows:

- ⑨ A photograph, taken from the outside, of a two-story country house, surrounded by trees and by fallen brown and orange leaves (**game aid 2**).
- ⑨ A road map of the Groton area (Vermont) with some handwritten notes about how to drive to a solitary house in a wooded area. The destination lies in a sparsely populated area, on the side of a hill, and close to a lake. Any search engine or maps app can confirm that the trip there would take 8 or 9 hours by car. (If they check other means of transport it turns out that, in fact, car is the fastest one, as flight connections are not straightforward at all.)



- ③ A piece of paper showing a strange design consisting of several circles and lines (**game aid 3**).
- ③ A printed piece of paper listing several dates, with always an exact four year difference between one and the next one, and the last one being two days from today (**game aid 4**). You can create the document yourself if you want to use it as a gaming aid. (If you use the dates we propose in this scenario, the last one will be October 4th, 2018, as “today” is October 2nd.)
- ③ A sticky note with the handwritten text: “Aden2018” (**game aid 5**). You can prepare it yourself if you want to use it as a gaming aid.

If they discuss all this information with their superiors, their orders are, on one hand, sending photos of everything they have found, and on the other, visiting the house on the map and, if a second amphora were to be found there – as the dying man’s warning seems to suggest – protect it inside the house until a specialist arrives. The specialist should arrive there in one or two days.

ABOUT THE HOUSE

If they think about requesting researching the place, while they are driving, later in the day, they get an encrypted email message with the following information:

- ③ The house was built in 2010 and is owned by an import-export company dealing with Saudi Arabia: Arabimpo, Inc., originally based in Aden (Yemen), and now in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).
- ③ The company has a small commercial representation office in Baltimore, USA, located in an office building (the company pays for having a landline there, someone to pick messages, and access to a meeting room if they ever need it, but it is not a real workplace and there are no direct employees there).

MANAGING THE TIME

We cannot foresee in which order your players will find out each clue, nor for how long will they interact with each other or discuss possible actions to take, so managing the time is in your hands.

In any case, as the scenario unwraps, and specially once inside the house, it is important to keep letting them know how the strength of the wind outside is constantly and steadily increasing. At some point the thump of a tree’s branches against the windows will startle them. Later, when the sun begins to set down (or as you decide it is a good moment) they can see whirlwinds of leaves raised by the gale building up.

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

The car trip to the place indicated on the map takes several hours. As they get closer, both their GPS and their phones’ signal keep failing more and more often. For the last kilometres (or miles, as you prefer) they need to keep checking the handwritten notes on the map they found at the luggage locker, as there is no signal whatsoever in any of their devices anymore. The attention they were paying to their screens is called for now by the map and the environment. An endless extension of red and orange trees flanks the roads, and a thick blanket of fallen leaves hides some of the forks, forcing the group to check the map and even to take their steps back from time to time. Fortunately, there are not so many roads around and finding the house is not such a complicated task in the end.

As they leave the car they feel the breeze is slightly stronger than what would feel nice. Besides that, the house itself looks exactly as in the photograph. It seems the image was taken from the front, more or less from the spot the PCs are in right now. The only difference being the security fence running along the whole perimeter, between the building and them. It is a metallic wire mesh of diagonal squares, supported at regular intervals by 1.80 or 2.00-metre high (6-7 ft) concrete pillars. In front of the main entrance is a locked two door black metal gate that could be opened to allow vehicles in.

FIRST VISION

As the trip to the house takes several hours, the basic options available to the group are, either sleeping in a road motel, or keeping driving in turns and sleeping in the car. In any case, you can use that time to introduce the scene below. If a specific PC insisted in driving by themselves alone all night (we would discourage that option as they would be too tired the following day to “operate” properly), and there were no –subtle- way to convince them otherwise, just play the scene with the rest. The relevant information will end reaching that character later on, when the others share their experiences in the dream.

If the group organise themselves in a way that avoids sleeping at all for everyone between the moment of finding the first amphora and the arrival at the house, you should use this vision as an hallucination and introduce it to each character individually. For example, when they see the house for the first time, before entering.

This scene is a dream (or hallucination) that each character experiences. Although it is (almost) exactly the same for all of them, we suggest you play it individually, to raise some confusion (and suspicion). You can read or paraphrase the following text:

You step out of your tent. The night has just arrived and you taste your tea at the same time you enjoy the endlessness of the desert. Your camel chews some roots, sitting on the floor, and roars, distracted.

You should reach the crossroads tomorrow, the old ruins, and meet the rest of the chosen ones, as foretold by the prophecy. You finally feel you are about to reach the end of a long travel. Just one more day, although the night's sky tells you there is a storm coming for tomorrow...

If it happens that each “real” (read “contemporary”) PC comes from a different cardinal point (as is the case with the pre-generated ones presented at the end of the book, and our advice if you roll new ones), you can add that information here: *“you have been travelling for days from the North/South/East/West...”*

The very last sentence of the dream is different for each character, as each one carries a different element. If you have fewer than four players, assign them the elements in the order below and ignore the last one/s.

- ① First character: *You sip your tea one more time and stroke the vial full of water they have ordered you to carry.*
- ② Second character: *You sip your tea one more time and stroke the small bag full of dirt they have ordered you to carry.*
- ③ Third character: *You sip your tea one more time and stroke the small sealed amphora they have ordered you to carry, it is so light you'd say it is empty.*
- ④ Fourth character: *You sip your tea one more time and stroke the lacquered box inside which you carry the flint and tinder they have ordered you to carry.*

It is likely that players will interrupt you and demand to know how this adds up to whatever they have been doing until here. Be dry and tell them that this is what they are seeing and doing right now, and that their characters would not come up with those questions, because they know who they are. The only question you can answer is “where am I?”, telling them that they are close to Adan (Adan is the ancient version of the name Aden, and the one those characters would use). Leave this as nothing more than an oneiric interlude (that is exactly what it is after all). As they wake up again in the reality they know, they will easily conclude it was just a dream.



There are plenty of fallen leaves also on the road to the gate, both inside and outside of the property, what would make anyone assume no car has visited the place in a long time. There are not any vehicles in the area nor anything that would make them think the house is occupied.

Next to the entrance is an intercom with a security camera. Pressing the button produces no response. If they insist, they notice that there is no electrical humming when they press. At one corner of the façade is a bigger security camera, pointing at the gate. If they pay attention, there is no lead that could reveal if it is active, nor does it follow them if they move around (in fact, it is turned off right now, but they cannot confirm it from their current position).

They can walk around as much as they want, and even enter the property. The house is empty. We are sure that, eventually, they'll come up with a plan to break in.

Once inside, let's begin with the basic things. If they open a tap, the water runs. What they do not have is

hot water, as the boiler runs on electricity and the supply is off. They need to find the electrical panel and switch the power on. The panel is located close to the main door, next to a wardrobe that contains an old umbrella and a pair of green gardening boots half covered in dried mud.

If they remember the external security camera and decide to check the cabling, the cord also ends here, connected to a small closed circuit monitor that shows the images the device takes from the outside (when switched on). However, these do not seem to be recorded anywhere. This camera is useful just to see what is happening outside at a certain moment, not as a security device.

In general terms the house is tidy. It looks as if they had left it closed for the "end of the season". There is no evidence of anyone having been living here in the last months. There is no mail in the mailbox and there is no landline. There are no clothes or personal objects. And obviously, there is still no mobile phone signal.

GAME AIDS

GAME AID 1 - DRAT OF THE AMPHORA



GAME AID 2 - PHOTOGRAPH OF A HOUSE IN THE FOREST



INVESTIGATORS

Below you'll find four pre-generated characters. For these we give you the attributes and skills, belongings, age and profession. Name, gender and physical appearance are for your players to decide.

ARCHAEOLOGIST

Age: 42. Born in Siracusa, NY.

STR 35 **CON** 55 **SIZ** 45 **DEX** 45 **INT** 100
APP 35 **POW** 70 **EDU** 85 **SAN** 70 **HP** 10

Damage bonus: -1

Build: -1

Move: 7

Magic Points: 14

Luck: 45

Armor: Kevlar vest (6 points of protection) *

(* this piece of equipment is only available during the initial assault scene.)

Attacks per round: 1

Fighting (Brawl) 25% (12/5), dmg 1D3-1 (BD)

Firearms (Handgun) 9 mm. Automatic 25% (12/5),
 dmg 1D10, range 15 yards, shots 1 (3), ammo 17,
 malfunction 98

Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) 25%

Dodge 22%

Skills: Appraise 10%, Archaeology 60%, Computer Use 5%, Credit 30%, Electric Repair 21%, Electronics 1%, Fast Talk 15%, History 50%, Library Use 50%, Listen 25%, Mechanical Repair 35%, Navigate 40%, Operate Heavy Machinery 30%, Own Language (English) 75%, Other Language (Arabic) 60%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 20%, Science (Geology) 60%, Spot Hidden 50%

